

Beowulf

VI

HROTHGAR answered, helmet of Scyldings:--

"I knew him of yore in his youthful days;
his aged father was Ecgtheow named,
to whom, at home, gave Hrethel the Geat
his only daughter. Their offspring bold
fares hither to seek the steadfast friend.
And seamen, too, have said me this, --
who carried my gifts to the Geatish court,
thither for thanks, -- he has thirty men's
heft of grasp in the gripe of his hand,
the bold-in-battle. Blessed God
out of his mercy this man hath sent
to Danes of the West, as I ween indeed,
against horror of Grendel. I hope to give
the good youth gold for his gallant thought.
Be thou in haste, and bid them hither,
clan of kinsmen, to come before me;
and add this word, -- they are welcome guests
to folk of the Danes." [To the door of the hall
Wulfgar went] and the word declared:--
"To you this message my master sends,
East-Danes' king, that your kin he knows,
hardy heroes, and hails you all
welcome hither o'er waves of the sea!
Ye may wend your way in war-attire,
and under helmets Hrothgar greet;
but let here the battle-shields bide your parley,
and wooden war-shafts wait its end."

Uprose the mighty one, ringed with his men,
brave band of thanes: some bode without,
battle-gear guarding, as bade the chief.
Then hied that troop where the herald led them,
under Heorot's roof: [the hero strode,]
hardy 'neath helm, till the hearth he neared.
Beowulf spake, -- his breastplate gleamed,
war-net woven by wit of the smith:--
"Thou Hrothgar, hail! Hygelac's I,
kinsman and follower. Fame a plenty
have I gained in youth! These Grendel-deeds
I heard in my home-land heralded clear.
Seafarers say how stands this hall,
of buildings best, for your band of thanes

empty and idle, when evening sun
 in the harbor of heaven is hidden away.
 So my vassals advised me well, --
 brave and wise, the best of men, --
 O sovran Hrothgar, to seek thee here,
 for my nerve and my might they knew full well.
 Themselves had seen me from slaughter come
 blood-flecked from foes, where five I bound,
 and that wild brood worsted. I' the waves I slew
 nicors [footnote 1] by night, in need and peril
 avenging the Weders, [footnote 2] whose woe they sought, --
 crushing the grim ones. Grendel now,
 monster cruel, be mine to quell
 in single battle! So, from thee,
 thou sovran of the Shining-Danes,
 Scyldings'-bulwark, a boon I seek, --
 and, Friend-of-the-folk, refuse it not,
 O Warriors'-shield, now I've wandered far, --
 that I alone with my liegemen here,
 this hardy band, may Heorot purge!
 More I hear, that the monster dire,
 in his wanton mood, of weapons recks not;
 hence shall I scorn -- so Hygelac stay,
 king of my kindred, kind to me! --
 brand or buckler to bear in the fight,
 gold-colored targe: but with gripe alone
 must I front the fiend and fight for life,
 foe against foe. Then faith be his
 in the doom of the Lord whom death shall take.
 Fain, I ween, if the fight he win,
 in this hall of gold my Geatish band
 will he fearless eat, -- as oft before, --
 my noblest thanes. Nor need'st thou then
 to hide my head; [footnote 3] for his shall I be,
 dyed in gore, if death must take me;
 and my blood-covered body he'll bear as prey,
 ruthless devour it, the roamer-lonely,
 with my life-blood redden his lair in the fen:
 no further for me need'st food prepare!
 To Hygelac send, if Hild [footnote 4] should take me,
 best of war-weeds, warding my breast,
 armor excellent, heirloom of Hrethel
 and work of Wayland. [footnote 5] Fares Wyrð [footnote 6] as she must."

Footnotes.

1.

The nicor, says Bugge, is a hippopotamus; a walrus, says ten Brink. But that water-

goblin who covers the space from Old Nick of jest to the Neckan and Nix of poetry and tale, is all one needs, and Nicor is a good name for him.

2.

His own people, the Geats.

3.

That is, cover it as with a face-cloth. "There will be no need of funeral rites."

4.

Personification of Battle.

5.

The Germanic Vulcan.

6.

This mighty power, whom the Christian poet can still revere, has here the general force of "Destiny."